

# Sharpening your Sales Skills: Justifying and Rationalizing Emotional Intelligence

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**Abstract.** Emotional intelligence is a relatively new domain of psychological investigation, having recently gathered considerable momentum with widespread, international media attention. Emotional Intelligence is defined as the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in the self and others, the adaptive regulation of emotion in the self and others, and the utilization of emotion to facilitate performance. According to popular opinion and work-place testimonials, emotional intelligence increases performance and productivity; however, there has been a general lack of independent, systematic analysis substantiating that claim. The present paper will discuss emotional intelligence's origins, its application to facilitate performance, and its training possibilities with the hope that organizations will begin to value its importance.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Labor, Constructive Thinking, Adaptive Selling, Emotional Ability, Sales Technique Training

## 1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI), according to Mayer & Salovey (1993), "is a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 433). Weisinger (1998) described EI as "the intelligent use of emotions: you intentionally make your emotions work for you by using them to help guide your behavior and thinking in ways that enhance your results".

The study of EI evolved from works by such theorists as Gardner (1983) and Williams and Sternberg (1988), who proposed broader approaches to understanding intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) coined the term "emotional intelligence" and included Gardner's intrapersonal and interpersonal components in the construct. Goleman (1995, 1998a) popularized emotional intelligence in the business realm by describing its importance as an ingredient for successful business careers and as a crucial component for effective group performance. Goleman (1998b) found that EI plays "an increasingly important role at the highest levels of the company, where differences in technical skills are of negligible importance. In other words, the higher the rank of the person considered to be a star performer, the more EI capabilities showed up as the reason for his or her effectiveness" (p. 94).

Current changes in the work environment suggest that EI will be of increasing importance to managers in the new millennium. To deal with rapid technological and social change, individuals need the interpersonal competencies included in the emotional intelligence construct: the ability to recognize and respond to the emotions and feelings of others, as well as the skill to help others manage their emotions (Schmidt, 1997). For example, knowing that emotional recognition and expression, and understanding others emotions impact on the ability to establish and sustain relationships, the constant need that sales professionals have in developing skills to handle rejection and maintain optimism. Thus by improving emotional management and emotional control we can improve the ability to handle rejection and remain positive.

This suggests that EI individuals who work well with others, and thus elevate the group's collective EI, will be the most valued and sought-after employees. Thus, if business instructors are truly to develop sales professionals, they need to improve their sales team EI as well as their cognitive skills and technical competence. One way to do this is that the sales training can be more targeted and effective given the direct correlation with EI competencies.

## 2. Appraisal/Expression in Self and Others

This component primarily deals with the ability of being aware of mood and thoughts concerning that mood (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). Research indicates that the ability to make faces appropriately communicating emotion to others and the ability to recognize these facial expressions increases linearly with age (Lewis, Sullivan, & Vasen, 1987; Profyt & Whissell, 1991). Despite this, there are adults in existence who are clueless as to their own feelings and who remain insensitive to others' experiences. Individuals vary in their ability to identify feelings communicated to them via facial expressions, communication of their own feelings to others, and in their ability to articulate feelings into words (Buck, 1984). An extreme case of not being able to recognize emotion, alexithymia, translates into "no words for feelings", and is a psychological disorder in which an individual is completely unable to use words to evaluate and express emotion (Davies et al, 1998).

Paul Ekman, researcher at the Medical school UC San Francisco, has conducted research on expression of emotion in faces. Ekman found writings of Duchenne, a contemporary of Darwin and one of the first researchers of neurophysiology and relating it to psychology. He took people that lost control of their facial muscles and attached electrodes to the muscles in the face. Duchenne found that although you can manipulate smiles in your face, you can't make the sparkle happen in your eye unless you are really feeling happy. Ekman referred to the smile of true emotion as the Duchenne smile that later became the "D smile". People are pretty good at spotting fake emotions and fake smiles. So the question is how we deal with a person exhibiting fake or inappropriate emotions.

### **3. Regulation of Emotion in Self/Others**

Davies et al (1998) defined regulation of emotion in the self as "referring to the meta-experience of mood or monitoring, evaluating, and acting to change one's mood" (p.991). It is an attempt to change unpleasant moods while sustaining pleasant ones. People engage in activities such as consumption of alcohol, exercising, and seeking others in their attempt to control mood. It seems that the key to successful control is choosing those methods that actually benefit the body and mind instead of harming it. The regulation of others' emotion deals with altering their affective reactions. This action takes place when a person calms fear in another or reassures another individual in order to reduce stress (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Many people's emotions are regulated by other individuals. For example, this regulation occurs when one is moved by others or when one feels impressed by another. Often people focus on the feelings of others and inhibit the display of one's true emotional reactions to a situation. Hochschild (1983) studied the occupation of flight attendant wherein individuals are taught to be happy and friendly to customers at all times no matter how they feel personally. He found that this type of extreme emotional regulation labeled "emotional labor" can be a health hazard and may lead to burnout. This is especially applicable to the sales situation where the sales professionals sometimes hide their true opinion or feelings to avoid rejection or negative impulses.

### **4. Using Emotion to Facilitate Performance**

Controlling emotion to reach a goal is necessary for motivation, attention, and focus. Goleman (1995) found that self-control of emotion and delay of gratification was predictive of later accomplishment. Moods influence problem solving outcomes because certain emotions promote different problem solving tasks. Creative and inductive reasoning has been found to be improved by happy moods while deductive reasoning and the careful consideration of multiple options was found to be enhanced by sad moods (Palfai & Salovey, 1992). Possibly happy and sad moods could be associated with certain information processing styles that affect performance.

Research has shown that people find it easier to categorize aspects of problems as related or unrelated when happy which has been linked to the facilitation of creative thinking (Isen & Daubman, 1984). Also, happy individuals experience higher levels of self-efficacy which is a critical aspect of performance (Salovey & Birnbaum, 1989). In addition to creative thinking, constructive thinking is dependent on managing emotion. Constructive thinking refers to a "person's ability to think in a manner that solves everyday problems in living at a minimal cost in stress" (Katz & Epstein, 1991, p.789). How people manage their emotions can be a major determinant of how effectively intellectual abilities can be assembled. Because

teams utilize both creative and constructive thinking in their problem solving, and because teams desire high self-efficacy to maintain performance, emotional intelligence is a valuable resource.

Attention is directed to different problems when powerful emotions are experienced. People may be redirected to give attention to problems with immediate importance. Rather than interrupt ongoing cognitive activities, emotion can assist people in reprioritizing the internal and external demands on their attention, and allocating resources accordingly (Salovey & Mayer, 1989-90). Moods may be used to motivate persistence at challenging tasks. People may use good moods to boost their self-efficacy, thus increasing performance at difficult tasks (Salovey & Birnbaum, 1989). People with positive attitudes create interpersonal experiences that lead to positive outcomes for themselves and others around them (Epstein & Feist, 1988). Sales professionals can use EI to remain focuses on the task at hand while keeping a positive relationship with customers.

## **5. Effect of Emotional Intelligence in Sales**

Despite such contributions of EI to an organization, there has been little research relating to the effects of EI on service organization. Service organizations are settings that require interpersonal interaction. For salespersons frequently interacting with customers, in particular, EI is an important emotional ability that can affect how to serve customers in a selling situation; however, there is insufficient research relating to this statement. The salespersons' job is to interact with customers in a selling situation; the core of sales is how a salesperson serves customers. Service employees' EI can affect method of providing service to customers.

Salesperson with high levels of EI manages their interactions with customers in a more effective manner. Affective commitment toward other people is a necessary component of social interaction and argued that the showing of positive emotions is associated with a high likelihood of success at work (Nikolaou and Tsaousis, 2002; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1990). Abraham (1999), based on her own earlier observation that optimistic insurance salesperson would perform better than pessimistic salesperson, proposed that EI is directly related to performance.

In the process of interaction with customers, employees should show an interest in customers and grasp their needs. Effective interaction may be expressed as broad interpersonal competencies, for example: adaptive selling, positive displayed emotion. Adaptive selling and expression of positive emotion are service providers' behavioral response by which intangibility of service is revealed in a tangible form. These are reflected in their observable physical behaviors and displays of initiative motivation, effort, appearance, and so on (Bardzil and Slaski, 2003). The Integrated ability afforded by high levels of emotional intelligence is interpreted as the antecedent variable of excellent service behaviors, and is thus central to the delivery of positive service at the level of the individual and the development of a climate for services at the level of the organization.

After all, for relationship between service providers' EI and behavior, the higher emotional intelligence is more likely to result in effective customization, adaptive behavior, and expression of emotion required by an organization. So service providers' EI and behavior (adaptive selling behavior and expression of positive emotion) are closely correlated.

## **6. Training Salespersons to be Emotionally Intelligent**

Most emotion skills can be improved through education and the understanding that all individuals operate from different emotional starting places or emotional knowledge bases (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Martinez-Pons (1998-1999) found that in teaching emotion skills to children, modeling, encouragement, facilitation, and rewarding behavior by others were key determinants of emotional intelligent behaviors being learned and later practiced.

Driven by increased competitive marker pressure and dramatic shift in customer requirements, sales professionals have found they must call on different decision makers and buying groups. Understandably, the new perspectives and requirements held by new buyers often result in sales representatives feeling confused, sometimes inadequate and at worst moments, angry with customers.

Managing these emotions more than additional sales technique training. It requires how to manage negative emotions and increase personal comfort in adapting to challenging situations. This adaptive capability cannot be acquired using traditional training methods. In teaching members emotional skills, it is important to use such techniques which assist salesperson in developing awareness of their emotions - in the moment, managing emotions and developing their emotional muscle to enhance effectiveness, sensing and responding to subtle customers no-verbal signals and integrating emotional awareness with authentic behavior.

It is also imperative to point out to the training group that individuals from different subcultures approach emotions differently. Certain cultures produce more stoic individuals while others promote extreme openness. This type of diversity must be acknowledged and appreciated in order for the sales professionals to be successful. It is important to keep in mind that EI training cannot be accomplished in a one day or one week training session. Training in emotion skills takes many months and must be revisited periodically to ensure the learning has been retained and put into practice on the job. Just because emotional skills are taught, one cannot guarantee the development of an emotionally intelligent person or sales team.

## 7. Conclusion

It cannot be ignored that corporate competitiveness can be improved by recruiting employees with high emotional ability, and by training them to promote and maintain emotional ability through socializing. In short, emotional intelligence is an essential ability for salespersons who interact frequently with customers and is a subject to be discussed from the marketing viewpoint. Prompted by rapid market changes, hyper-competition, and the need to overcome barriers to growth, companies have realized that traditional techniques are necessary to establish foundation skills, but are insufficient when striving for excellence. By cultivation emotional intelligence in harmony with knowledge and skills, sales person improve their ability to adapt sales skills to create highly valued relationship and trust, despite situational, economic or industry volatility.

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